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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 0543
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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 0075
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0232
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC PRIORITY
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2371
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1755
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BISHKEK 000196

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SUBJECT: KYRGYZ OPPOSITION'S NEW "UNITED FRONT"

REF: BISHKEK 184

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Classified By: Charge Lee Litzenberger, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Kyrgyz opposition has formed a new alliance, calling for the removal of President Bakiyev and for "real" constitutional reform. Led by former Prime Minister Felix Kulov, the "United Front for Kyrgyzstan's Decent Future" has attracted many -- but not all -- opposition leaders. Some opposition figures have yet to accept Kulov as a sincere member of the opposition, and they also question United Front's tactic of calling for Bakiyev's ouster. The new alliance has apparently struck a nerve with the government, prompting a sharp response from the president's press secretary, who dismissed United Front's statement as a "manifestation of radicalism." END SUMMARY.

UNITED WE STAND

12. (SBU) Former PM Felix Kulov and several opposition MPs announced February 19 a new alliance called the "United Front for Kyrgyzstan's Decent Future." The alliance's stated goals are to remove Bakiyev from office, initiate early presidential elections, and push for "real" constitutional reforms. In its public statement, United Front charged that President Bakiyev failed to fight corruption and develop Kyrgyzstan's economy, but instead incited instability by not preserving the Bakiyev-Kulov "tandem" agreement -- an agreement not just between Bakiyev and Kulov, but also with the Kyrgyz people. In addition, United Front accused Bakiyev of allowing nepotism and corruption to spread, while doing nothing to encourage constitutional reform. To reverse such trends, United Front signatories vowed to initiate "real" constitutional reforms, put limits on presidential powers, and create a new and improved judiciary. The statement did not specify how the alliance would achieve its goals. United

Front member and co-Chair of the "For Reforms" opposition movement, MP Omurbek Tekebayev, said only that United Front, possibly together with For Reforms, would exert certain "moral and political pressure" to achieve its aims.

¶3. (U) The alliance includes the former PM (who was elected leader of the opposition group); MPs Melis Eshimkanov, Omurbek Tekebayev, Kubatbek Baibolov; former Minister of Interior Omurbek Suvanaliyev (who was elected the group's chief of staff); For Reforms Coordinator Omurbek Abdarahmanov; Ata Meken political council member Duishen Chotonov; Ar Namys political council member Emil Aliyev; Green Party leader Erkin Bulekbayev; and former Kulov advisor, Valeriy Dil.

DIVIDED WE FALL?

¶4. (C) Not everyone in the opposition has embraced the new alliance. Opposition MP Azimbek Beknazarov said that he would join the group only if Bakiyev resigned voluntarily and announced early presidential elections on his own. For Reforms co-Chair Almaz Atambayev told the Charge February 21 that he would not join a group led by Kulov, who not only betrayed the opposition during the November protests but also "ruined" the accomplishments of the November rallies by doing everything in his power to ensure the adoption of the "authoritarian" December version of the constitution. Atambayev also rejected United Front's "radical agenda" calling for Bakiyev's resignation. He said that the opposition should continue to press for reforms, including constitutional reform, an end to political harassment, and changes to government personnel policy. If Bakiyev made these reforms, Atambayev said, he could remain in power, even through to 2015.

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¶5. (C) Separately, For Reforms member Edil Baisalov told Poloff that he would prefer to see early parliamentary elections, rather than a push for the president's removal. Baisalov said that a new parliament would allow for a more democratic transition from one government to the next (under the terms of the new constitution). It would also help to ensure stability within the country and improve Kyrgyzstan's image abroad. Baisalov thought, however, that MPs would not voluntarily dissolve parliament and call for new elections. That is why, added Baisalov, it was important for heavyweights like Kulov, Sariyev, and Eshimkanov to put pressure on parliament from within to stimulate the possibility of holding parliamentary elections by the end of ¶2007.

GOVERNMENT REACTIONS

¶6. (C) The president's press secretary delivered a sharp response to United Front's statement, calling the alliance's objectives outrageous and unfounded. Additionally, the government charged that United Front had no moral or legal right to seek Bakiyev's resignation and call for early presidential elections. Similarly, pro-government MP Iskhak Masaliyev told Charge that there was no legal basis to call for the president's removal, and there was no reason to initiate impeachment proceedings against the president. Additionally, Masaliyev said that although criticism of the president was good, the opposition should not attempt to destabilize the country by taking to the streets. Masaliyev was curious whether the Embassy had met with United Front leaders; he cautioned that the group had radical ambitions. The MP also forecast that United Front would disband quickly, due to the presidential ambitions shared by several of the alliance's leading members.

COMMENT: A DEFINITE CONCERN FOR BAKIYEV

17. (C) United Front's union marks the beginning of what will undoubtedly be a drawn-out political conflict between Bakiyev, his supporters in the government, and Kulov. With a number of prominent opposition members, including Atambayev, Beknazarov, Sariyev, and Baisalov, still unsure about the alliance's aims, however, we could also be witnessing further divisions amongst the already splintered opposition. Despite those divisions, the government is already revealing its angst regarding Kulov and the possibility that he will rally forces against the government, and we will likely see increased government pressure against Kulov and his new allies.

LITZENBERGER